

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 00094 061501Z
ACTION NODS-00

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O 061415Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS NIACT IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6310

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 0094

EXDIS - TREAT AS NODIS

FOR THE SECRETARY'S ATTENTION

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MARR PLO SY US
SUBJECT: CONGRESSMEN MEET ARAFAT AND RECEIVE MESSAGE FOR CARTER

SUMMARY: FOUR MEMBERS OF HIRC MET ARAFAT AND PLO AIDES IN
DAMASCUS JANUARY 5. ARAFAT HAS FURNISHED CONGRESSMAN FINDLEY
MESSAGE FOR PRESIDENT CARTER WHICH FINDLEY TENTATIVELY
PLANS TO DELIVER EMBASSY CAIRO FOR ONWARD TRANSMISSION. WE
STRONGLY DISCOURAGED ANY PUBLICITY ABOUT MESSAGE AND
REQUESTING ANY EMBASSY INVOLVEMENT IN TRANSMITTING TEXT.
END SUMMARY

1. CONGRESSMAN FINDLEY (R-ILL), ALONG WITH THREE HIRC
COLLEAGUES FROM CODEL ZABLOCKI, MET WITH PLO LEADERS
YASSIR ARAFAT, FARUK KADUMI, BASIL AQL AND ABU MAHIR IN
DAMASCUS FOR THREE HOURS AFTERNOON JAN 5. NEAR END OF MEETING,
ARAFAT DICTATED A STATEMENT WHICH FINDLEY UNDERTOOK TO
RELAY TO PRESIDENT CARTER. I ATTENDED BRIEFING WHICH
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FINDLEY GAVE SUBSEQUENTLY FOR CODEL COLLEAGUES AND
UNDERSTAND THAT MESSAGE IS ALONG PREDICTABLE LINES THAT ARAFAT
WANTS TO MAINTAIN A MODERATE LINE AND HIS EMPHASIS THAT
HE HAD BEEN A DEFENDER OF PRESIDENT CARTER'S POLICIES
WITHIN PLO COUNCILS AGAINST HARDLINERS. ARAFAT SAID
HE FELT THERE HAD BEEN A DETERIORATION OF US POLICY
TOWARDS THE PALESTINIAN STATE SINCE THE US-SOVIET

COMMUNIQUE. HE HOPED PRESIDENT CARTER WOULD NOT PUSH HIM FURTHER INTO A CORNER. ARAFAT PROFESSED TO SEE GLIMMER OF HOPE IN THE PRESIDENT'S ASWAN STATEMENT EVEN THOUGH PRESIDENT DID NOT MENTION PLO.

2. ARAFAT REFERRED BITTERLY TO DR. BRZEZINSKI'S "BYE BYE PLO" STATEMENT. HE AND HIS COMPANIONS RIDICULED THIS STATEMENT SAYING THE PALESTINIANS ARE HERE, WILL BE AROUND FOR A LONG TIME, AND ANYTHING THE US MAY SAY WILL NOT AFFECT THIS.

3. REGARDING PALESTINIAN STATE, ARAFAT TOLD FINDLEY HE WOULD BE SATISFIED WITH INDEPENDENT STATE ON WEST BANK AND GAZA STRIP BUT IT MUST BE FULLY INDEPENDENT. PLO WAS READY TO ESTABLISH SUCH AN INDEPENDENT STATE ON ANY PART OF LIBERATED PALESTINE. HE SAID HE WOULD ALSO BE READY TO ACCEPT AN INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPING FORCE IN THE NEW STATE OF PALESTINE CONSISTING OF FORCES OF THE FIVE VETO POWER NATIONS IN THE UN "SINCE THESE FORCES WOULD BE SUBJECT TO THE COMMAND OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL" (SIC). HE DID NOT SPECIFY HOW LONG THESE FORCES SHOULD STAY BUT SAID THIS WAS A DETAIL WHICH COULD BE WORKED OUT. (FINDLEY WONDERED WHETHER THIS WAS NOT A NEW ELEMENT OF MODERATION IN ARAFAT'S POSITION. HE AND OTHER ATTENDEES COULD NOT RECALL ARAFAT HAVING SAID IT BEFORE.) QUESTIONED ABOUT DESIRABILITY OF INTRODUCING SOVIET FORCES INTO AREA, ARAFAT SAID THE PEACEKEEPING CONFIDENTIAL

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FORCE MIGHT NOT REQUIRE SERVICES OF GREAT POWERS, I.E. US OR SOVIET FORCES.

4. ARAFAT CLAIMED THAT ISRAEL NEED NOT FEAR PALESTINIAN EXPANSIONISM SINCE MINI-STATE WOULD BE SURROUNDED BY OVERWHELMINGLY SUPERIOR MILITARY FORCES. IN ADDITION, STATE WOULD TAKE FIFTEEN YEARS TO SET UP BASIC INFRA-STRUCTURE OF HOSPITALS AND SCHOOLS AND PALESTINIANS DID NOT INTEND TO WASTE THEIR RESOURCES ON ARMS.

5. ASKED IF PLO STATE WOULD HAVE NORMAL RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL, ARAFAT REPLIED "NOT IMMEDIATELY" SINCE PLO HAS ONLY ONE CARD TO PLAY AND THIS MUST BE USED AT PROPER TIME. HE SAID DIPLOMATIC RECOGNITION WOULD DEPEND ON ISRAEL'S BEHAVIOR AFTER ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW STATE.

6. ARAFAT SAID THAT PRESIDENT SADAT HAD TOLD HIM THE TRIP TO JERUSALEM WAS MADE AT US REQUEST AND UNDER US PRESSURE. ACCORDING TO ARAFAT, SADAT CLAIMED HE HAS A PERSONAL LETTER FROM CARTER TO THIS EFFECT. ARAFAT DISAPPROVED OF THE JERUSALEM VISIT. NEVERTHELESS, ARAFAT ASSERTED HE CONTINUED RELATIONSHIP WITH EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT THROUGH PRESENCE OF TWO CHIEF

LIEUTENANTS IN CAIRO.

7. ARAFAT STRESSED AT SEVERAL POINTS THAT HE COULD ACT AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN ISRAEL AND ARABS. THE PALESTINIANS UNDERSTAND THE JEWS FROM THEIR PRIOR LIFE IN PALESTINE AND BECAUSE "WE ARE COUSINS."

8. IN RESPONSE CODEL QUESTIONING, ARAFAT DENIED CATEGORICALLY THAT HE OR PLO LEADERSHIP HAD EVER ORDERED ANY TERRORIST INCIDENT. (SIC) HE SAID HE HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH MUNICH BUT ADMITTED HE COULD NOT CONTROL ALL HIS PEOPLE. CONGRESSMEN SAID THAT ARAFAT HAD BEEN SHAKEN BY THE ASSASSINATION THIS WEEK OF PLO REP IN LONDON WHOM HE DESCRIBED AS HIS CLOSE FRIEND. ARAFAT CLAIMED CONFIDENTIAL

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THAT IRAQ WAS RESPONSIBLE.

9. THE CONVERSATION WAS HELD IN ENGLISH AND WAS TAPE RECORDED. ARAFAT IMPRESSED CONGRESSMEN AS "CANDID, GENTLE MANNERED AND VERY INTELLIGENT." ARAFAT SAID HE WOULD HAVE TAPE TRANSCRIBED AND SENT TO CAIRO FOR CODEL USE.

10. FINDLEY SAID HE WOULD LIKE MAKE A PUBLIC STATEMENT ABOUT HIS TALK WITH ARAFAT, PERHAPS ON ARRIVAL IN CAIRO, AND WOULD DELIVER ARAFAT MESSAGE TO AMBASSADOR EILTS AT CAIRO. AFTER THE BRIEFING, I TALKED PRIVATELY TO FINDLEY. NOTED THAT THIS IS PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE MOMENT FOR ME NEGOTIATIONS. I URGED HE NOT PUBLICIZE NEWS THAT HE HAD AN ARAFAT/CARTER MESSAGE SINCE THIS COULD ONLY STIMULATE MISUNDERSTANDING AND EMBARRASSMENT WHICH WOULD BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE TO PRESENT PEACE EFFORTS (PLO BEIRUT HAS ALREADY PUBLICIZED FACT OF CONGRESSIONAL MEETING WITH ARAFAT, AS FAR AS WE KNOW WITHOUT MENTIONING ARAFAT/CARTER MESSAGE). SAID I DOUBTED IN ANY EVENT WHITE HOUSE WOULD WANT EMBASSY CAIRO OR ANY OTHER US MISSION USED AS VEHICLE FOR DELIVERY OF SUCH MESSAGE. FINDLEY PROFESSED UNDERSTANDING BUT FEELS HE HAS OBLIGATION TO DELIVER MESSAGE. HE ACKNOWLEDGED HE COULD ARRANGE DELIVERY ON HIS OWN AFTER RETURN TO WASHINGTON O/A JANUARY 20. HE WOULD APPRECIATE FURTHER GUIDANCE WHEN HE REACHES CAIRO TODAY WHERE DELEGATION WILL STAY UNTIL PROCEEDING TO AMMAN JANUARY 9. MURPHY

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